



Two mosques the 20th cen

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SAJID ABBAS visits two mosques built in the last century, and though Wazeer Khan's, each has an interesting story attached to it

It were the Grand Moghuls who could rightly be credited with making Lahore the most attractive and charming city of their empire and the South Asian Sub-Continent. Nevertheless, with the demise of Aurangzeb, things started changing. The glory of Lahore started fading and within a century the City nearly lost all its glamour to the forays of marauding hordes of raiders or the assaults of plundering rulers.

It was only after peace had returned to this land in the nineteenth century that people thought of rebuilding this City and putting up edifices or structures for the convenience of the public or the use of the community. Amongst these, places or worship or mosques were where people could also give vent to their feelings, urges and artistic expressions latent in them and seeking an exposure, involuntarily.

The Government of the day took in hand a number of projects, in the second half of the nineteenth century, to restore the beauty of this city, but nothing was comparable to what was done in, say, the days of Shahjehan. Amongst the places or worship only the Lahore Cathedral seems to contain a bit of official participation at that time. It was almost another century before the Authorities participated in a project of, somewhat, similar nature, albeit, quite different otherwise. That was when the mosque in the mausoleum complex of Data Sahib was built. Nevertheless, the public did not loose their latent urge and went about building in their modest way a number of places of worship.

Coming from the Mochi towards the Shahalami Darwaaza as one reaches it, there is a charming little structure, topped by a dome, just like a doll house out of a child's fairy tale book, on one's left. It is a small mosque, a two storied edifice, with shops on the ground floor and the prayer chamber on top, approachable by a flight of steps. The mosque is Masjid Shaheed or more



Muslim Masjid outside Lohari Darwaza

popularly called the Masjid Aik Raat, or the mosque (built) overnight, for, it was constructed in one go between nightfall and daybreak next morning.

The mosque, though not the first one to be built in the twentieth century, has an interesting history. Some eighty or eighty-five years ago, there was just a low platform at the site, built by construction workers to say their prayers. The labourers used to work for contractors building houses in the area. Though, the houses and the neighbourhood belonged to the

Hindus, the labour was mostly Muslim. In the course of time, the form came into the use of Muslims, the workers in the bazaars and the place and passers prayers too.

Since, the neighbourhood was dominated by the Hindus, they built a temple there, unfortunately close to the platform. Seeing that, the Muslims too

wished to put up a structure over the platform, but the Hindus protested and threatened to agitate, the Authorities, therefore, refused the Muslims permission to build and to avoid any further friction between the two communities. The decision was, naturally, unpalatable for the Muslims.

It was sometime in May 1922, that some

enterprising young men got together and quietly organised the construction of the edifice. So, one evening after the Isha prayers, hundreds of volunteers appeared at the site equipped with building material, tools and implements and put

Masjid Shaheed outside Shahalami Darwaza



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ough not as grand as Badshahi or

up the structure before the call of the Fajr prayers next morning.

The Hindus, though they could do nothing at that moment except wringing their hands, took the case to different fora and succeeded in getting the superstructure above the platform demolished by the Municipality, since technically, it was built without permission. Nevertheless, two years later the mosque was rebuilt, this time with proper authority and permission.

Anjuman-e-Islamia was quite active in the whole episode. It was with their effort that the mosque was completed over the years. It is an adorable little mosque, small but very pleasing to look at. It can accommodate just a handful of people in the prayer chamber under the dome, for, it was never meant to be a Jamey Masjid or congregational mosque. The looks are, however, being interfered with. An unsightly roof made of sheets has been installed which makes the otherwise charming little structure look drab and unpleasant. One wonders if that has been noticed by the Authorities.

Not very far from the Masjid Shaheed, a couple of hundred meters to the west, right outside the Loharee Darwaaza one can find a mosque built in brick and mortar of an extraordinary construction. It has an unusually long length and a relatively narrow width. It has two storeys. The prayer chamber, courtyard and the ablution area are on the first floor, whereas the ground floor is occupied by a large number of shops opening towards the Circular Road. Half a century ago, nothing of the sort existed there, there wasn't any thing of significance except a few graves and a small well with a wooden jackroll to draw water. All this occupied an area of just thirty or thirty-five square metres.

It is said that sometime in 1925, a preacher happened to start delivering lectures on religious matters at this spot, every Friday. The preacher was Maulana



Another view of Muslim Masjid

Muhammad Bukhsh Muslim. Soon a Society of good intentioned people was formed who laid the foundations of a modest place of worship. Gradually the Friday gatherings grew larger and larger. The place became known as the Muslim Masjid.

By the end of nineteen thirties the place acquired a political colour. Between 1940 and 1947 the place became a centre of propaganda in favour of Pakistan, till Independence was achieved in August 1947. By that time the place had become extremely popular, everybody flocked to listen to Maulana Muslim deliver his lecture and sermon on Fridays. The place

used to be jam-packed, many late comers could not find any place and had to leave disappointed.

In June 1950, the first brick of the present edifice was laid. It took ten years and one hundred seventy-five thousand rupees to reach the shape that one finds it in now. In 1955 a school, 'Madrassa-e-Kareemia' was added to it where apart from religious instruction, children are imparted vocational education and training.

The shops belonging to the Mosque have been let out to people and firms dealing in medicines and the place is now known to be a market of medical drugs and medicines. ■